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Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

School Committees Call for GMO Labeling and Bar GMOs from School Lunches 1998

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Report Highlights:

Some local school committees have banned GMO products from use in school lunches and have called for the government to require that all GMO products to be labelled.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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Below is the translation of a newspaper article about genetically modified organism (GMO) foods in school lunches. Although these types of activities are not common among local education committees, similar movements may spread in the future. If the government introduces mandatory labeling on GMOs, these committees would likely be one of the first parties that would recommend that foods with made from GMOs be banned from school lunches. School lunches are served to children at virtually all public elementary and junior high schools in Japan. Usually, local education committees decide the menu and foods that are used.

Some elementary and junior high schools have begun to confirm the use of non-GMO foods in their school lunch. Although the government has confirmed the safety of GMO foods, some citizens are concerned about the unknown influence (of GMO's) on human and environment.

For example, schools in Kofu City have been using rice bran oil instead of soybean oil, domestically grown potatoes and corn, and non-GMO tofu and miso (soybean paste). The Kofu local education committee decided to avoid using GMO foods in response to a question at the city assembly last spring. The education committee had their distributors investigate the purchasing channels and production origins and certify those food products as non-GMO.

The School Health Education Division of the Ministry of Education said that "the Ministry of Health and Welfare has confirmed the safety of GMO foods." However, the division also admitted that "there are guidelines (on school lunch foods) that require that harmful foods be avoided, but the operation of the guidelines is done by local authorities, and the decision on whether or not to use GMO foods

is up to them."

The bottleneck is labeling. Since there are no labeling requirements on GMO products, voluntary declaration by distributors is the only means to rely on. Most local committees have quit investigating products that use soybeans and corn invisibly. The increased expense by use of non-GMO foods is another problem. Kofu City bears two more yen per meal for such increase.

Setsuko Yasuda, director general of a consumer group, "Non-GMO Foods Campaign" stated, "We should certainly not let children eat questionable foods. The GMO issue, along with imported foods and food container safety, raises a good question on school lunch safety. All the investigation at the moment is carried out by distributors. Although such (non-GMO) measures are taken, all the burden falls on distributors. We would strongly like to require mandatory labeling by the government." --*Asahi Shimbun*, July 9, 1998